

Good morning. As many of you know my name is Jordan Parker and I am the president and co-founder of the Claire Parker Foundation. Pastor Shevi asked me to come and present this morning and I am honored to be able to jump into his sermon series on the "I AM" statements of Jesus. The gospel of John is written quite differently the previous gospels. Specifically, we know that Jesus traveled throughout the region, performing miracles, and teaching about the coming kingdom. However, our focus often goes away from the primary audience in which Jesus was speaking. His disciples. Jesus was intentional about directing the majority of His ministry to teaching these 12 men. Why? Because that is how the church will truly be started. Jesus is building the foundation in 12 men, and those 12 men will set the world on fire with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But first, Jesus has to turn all of their cultural and religious beliefs upside. One of the most powerful teachings He uses is the "I AM" statement in John 15. Let's go to the text.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes^[1] so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

⁹ "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

Historic Significance of "I Am"

1. As mentioned earlier, Jesus is going to turn traditional Judaic religion on its head. Judaism relies on law. Specifically the Law of Moses. Moses is and remains one of the most revered prophets.
2. This is important to recognize. In Exodus 3:13-14, Moses is sent back to Egypt to free his people. Listen to what God tells him, “Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?” God said to Moses, “I Am WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.”
3. Jesus speaks in an intentional and specific language to connect Judaic religion to the kingdom he is bringing him. Simply beginning his statement with “I AM” he is telling them that I am Lord, I am Messiah, I am supreme. After each I AM statement he ushers in the kingdom of God. Let’s break down the pieces of this powerful “I AM” statement.

What is the vine?

The vine is Power and Authority.

1. **Where is our authority? What do we view as authority and power in this world? Government, religion, or even family structures.**
2. **The disciples were operating under a religious structure that had become so pious and predicated on law, that God had almost become secondary. The Jewish people were hoping that the Messiah would not only bring fulfillment to the priesthood of Judaism, but also free them from the oppression of the Roman government.**
3. **While we often say that power and authority rests with God alone, I’m, afraid that our society is largely putting their faith in manmade structures. Our hope can be easily placed in world leaders on the political stage. Our faith is often put in a man standing in this pulpit rather than the freeing power of Christ.**
3. **Jesus is speaking the direct truth that everything begins with him and he is the ultimate authority. Apart from an intimate relationship with him, we are not connected to God.**

The vine is Connected to the Branches.

1. This is an important piece to recognize. John the Baptist came before Jesus to pave a way for him. Jesus came into this world to cleanse us of our sins and bring salvation to all people. What then?

2. The church had to get started somehow. A simple belief in Jesus is not enough. We have to have an ongoing relationship with him that is rooted in a lifetime of constant sanctification. The only way to achieve this is to be in constant connection with the vine. Jesus.

3. Jesus is the vine and we as Christ-Followers are His branches. Branches are not stagnant. If they are stagnant then they are dying. While some branches may grow slower than others, the end result is that the branches will bloom and produce. Without production how can we ever say we are connected to the vine?

The Branches produce Fruit.

1. The fruit that we produce is the most significant indicator of our walk with Christ. We live in church culture that is focused on comfort and ease. Our view of success is conversion and numbers, not true disciple-making. Why is this problem?

I'm not going to even begin to start discussion about heaven and hell when discussing sin. But, I will say that if you are walking in consistent darkness because of continued sin it has eternal ramifications.

2. Personally, I have a hard time wrapping my mind around eternity. Heaven is the "Christian" thing to talk about. Our foundation was started because Connie and I have a daughter waiting for us in heaven, and I have no idea what that is going to look like. That is an eternal mindset, and it is really hard to go there when we are here, living in this minuscule of daily life. But I can relate to that minuscule. My flesh has an earthly mindset. And I can tell you that if you are someone who claims Christ and is living in constant darkness from sin, the earthly consequences are detrimental to your life today. But not only your life but those around you.

3. As Christ-followers we have a higher calling here on earth. Our father is not a God that makes us follow a set of rules just because they are His laws, but because they bring about a more fulfilling and joyous life for us and everyone around us. The fruit that we

produce here on earth is more than just trying to save as many people from Hell as possible. Our fruit must be rooted in love, and that will produce a church that longs for deeper relationship with Christ here on earth, that leads to an eternity with Him.

The branches require Pruning.

1. There are times when God may work in us to eliminate areas of our life that are holding us back. Will we choose to listen or continue to do things our way?
2. Last summer we were experiencing significant growth as a foundation. Our foundation hinges on 3 important pieces. A great product, strong relationship with hospitals, and connecting to our families. I decided that it was time for the foundation to expand. So I identified the 10 hospitals in the radius I wanted us to expand, packaged sample boxes of our product and sent it to the Child Life Specialists at each hospital. Within 2 weeks we had gone from a foundation with 9 hospitals up and down the east coast, to a 15 hospitals stretching all the way to Texas.
3. Things looked great. However, the budget did not. I had single-handedly spearheaded this expansion and was asking everyone to get on board to help. However, I never prayed about it, I never sought counsel, I just decided it was time to grow.
4. God pruned me in that season. We were and continue to do meaningful work, but in my goal to help, I lost sight of God's goal for our foundation. Deep relationships. We scaled back down to our Virginia and North Carolina hospitals and God opened the floodgates for us. We have been able to add services, develop new partnerships, and streamline our work to a way that we never would have imagined.
5. Sometimes as Christ-Followers we are so scattered that we lose focus on what is right in front of us. We want to save the world and in the process we don't take care of the little things God has given us.
6. I'm the assistant principal at Southside Elementary School and tell people that I'm a husband first, father second and principal 3rd. If I fail at the first 2 I have no business doing the 3rd. My focus has to be on the little things God has given me before I can be entrusted with more.

The vine is the Source of Life.

As I stated before, I have a daughter waiting for me in heaven. For our family, when we walked through cancer with a young child, people questioned many of our decisions. The main decision was whether or not we would take Claire into hospice care when she relapsed. Typically, that decision is based on percentages and a child's willingness to fight. But Claire couldn't communicate that to us. So Connie and I listened to each doctor's opinion on the case. We pinned them down. We asked them what they would do. But ultimately, no decision was made until Connie and I separated, prayed and then came back together. God led us to our decision because our decision was not based on this life, but our life abundantly in heaven. And that is a hard thing for people to wrap their heads around. Every part of our human nature is to fight, but God consistently commands us over and over to submit. Submit to Him completely and rest in His love. What does that look like in your own life?

One of my favorite preachers to listen to is Francis Chan, and when asked about a hot button issue in the church today, His answer was so simple and true. He stated that I have to do what God says because He is God. If He tells me in scripture this is how I am supposed to live, there is no theological angle. There are no books or manmade opinions. He is God. That has to be what drives our lives.

Jesus is telling us that our connection to Him is imperative to our life here and eternally. Without Him, we can do nothing.

The way you live your life is a testimony that will be known to others. Are you walking in God's love today? Do you have that connection to the vine and the ultimate source of life, Jesus our Savior?

Let's pray.